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MUSIC.

THE LAST OF RUBINSTEIN.

UNLESS Hans von Bülow should carry out his half-formed wish of a visit to the United States, it must be long before we can hope to hear in New York a series of performances in any way comparable to the seven pianoforte recitals which Mr. Rubinstein gave at Steinway Hall just before his departure. The series extended over the brief space of ten days, and during the intervals of the New York performances the pianist made three rapid journeys to Boston, and gave a similar but abridged course of concerts there. His programmes, all played, of course, from memory, embraced about one hundred and fifty different pieces, and on one occasion he played twenty-five or thirty at a single sitting. The wonderful physical powers and the phenomenal memory exhibited in this undertaking are not, however, by any means the chief claims of the final Rubinstein recitals to critical consideration. They formed, if we may so say, a complete course of illustrations of the history of pianoforte music, beginning with the first development of the art, under Johann Sebastian Bach, and passing through all the subsequent schools, down to Rubinstein himself. Although it would have been impossible, of course, in seven concerts, or, for the matter of that, in seventeen, or in twenty-seven, to present specimens of every notable composer for the pianoforte, we can safely say that Mr. Rubinstein neglected no truly representative composer, and no distinct school. Following the chronological order, and making his selections with a wise regard to the general result, he showed the progress of the art and the movement of the public taste in a manner both instructive and interesting in the highest degree.

The first of the Rubinstein recitals was given on the 12th of May. It opened with two or three of the Preludes and Fugues from Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavichord," the foundation of modern pianoforte music, as the clavichord was the foundation of the modern piano. How easy and elegant was the master's handling of these wonderful structures! It was formal, of course, like the stately gayety and the dignified manners of genteel society in the days of our great-grand-parents, but it was so fresh and so graceful that its formality was forgotten and its measured movement was never stiff. A rigorous fidelity to the rhythm is of the essence of good fugue playing, and it might have been expected that Rubinstein's vehement and impassioned nature would often tempt him to transgress this cardinal requirement. Once or twice, indeed, his characteristic impetuosity did carry him away for a moment, but the blemish was so slight and occurred so seldom that it hardly deserves to be mentioned. After the selections from the "Well-Tempered Clavichord," he played a jig by the same composer: it may sound odd to apply the epithet "noble" to a jig, but that word does exactly describe it. The selections from the elder Bach closed with the famous Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, which gave us one of the most superb illustrations conceivable of Rubinstein's magnetic force. Then came a charming Rondo by C. P. E. Bach, the son of Johann Sebastian, and after him appeared the stately, magnificent figure of Father Handel, with whom the specimens of the first school came to an end. The selections from Handel included an Air and Variations in D minor, and the Air and Variations in E major, commonly known as the "Harmonious Blacksmith." Handel gave place to Haydn (Andante and Variations), and Haydn was followed by Domenico Scarlatti, one of the best of the old harpsichord masters, from whose works Mr. Rubinstein chose the "Cat's Fugue" and a Sonata, so-called, in one movement. The concert closed with Mozart, represented by the Fantasia in C minor, the Gigue in G major, the well-known Rondo in A minor, and the movement *alla Turca* from the Sonata in A major; and we are not sure but Rubinstein played Mozart best of all the list.

The second recital was devoted wholly to Beethoven, and Mr. Rubinstein played six entire Sonatas—a performance which has probably had no parallel, at least in this country. He gave the tender, graceful, picturesque composition in C sharp minor, known for some inscrutable reason as the Moonlight Sonata; the romantic D minor and E major; the C major (which he had played here before at some of his miscellaneous concerts); the Sonata Appassionata; and finally the great one in C minor, the last and grandest of the whole wonderful series. This selection showed a much richer variety than one would have thought it possible to arrange from a single class of works by a single composer; for it covered nearly the whole of Beethoven's career, and it exhibited almost every phase of his genius. With this greatest of all composers Rubinstein has, as we all know, a very close sympathy; and it is almost superfluous to say that his interpretations were those of a devout and loving student. Perhaps it was in the familiar and favorite measures of the Sonata Appassionata that he made the pleasantest impression upon the miscellaneous public; but musicians will long remember his stupendous performance of the Sonata in C minor as one of the most brilliant of all his many astonishing efforts.

On the third programme appeared the names of Schubert, Weber, and Mendelssohn, the three great masters of the earlier romantic and poetical school, and the three who, after Beethoven, have probably the widest circle of loving admirers. From Schubert the selections were the Fantasia in C major, the Minuet of the Fantasia in G, and three strongly contrasted numbers of the *Moments musicaux*. They were all played with exceptional brilliancy and freedom; perhaps if there is any one adjective which especially characterizes the performance, it is the word "picturesque." The interpretation of Weber was harshly criticised by several of the writers for the daily press, but we dissent from their censures most emphatically. We doubt, indeed, whether there is any journalist in New York who can find serious fault with this extraordinary man without laying himself open to the charge of impertinence. Like all men of real genius, Rubinstein is unequal; but he never plays without exhibiting that sacred fire in whose presence the true critic forgets all little faults, and bows in reverence and admiration. We do not quarrel with the spots on the sun; we thank God for the glorious and bountiful light, and if there are any blemishes on the face of the great luminary, we do not see them. But even as a matter of comparison, it seems to us that the opinion of the dissatisfied critics is entirely indefensible. They did not find in the performance of Weber exactly what they expected to find, and therefore they infer that the interpreter was at fault. Rubinstein is a

better judge than we can be of Weber's meaning. He has an informed appreciation of Weber's spirit. There is no standard of comparison by which we can measure the accuracy of that appreciation, because there has never been an artist in this country who even approached Rubinstein in the splendor of his musical gifts. Some of the selections which he chose on this occasion were familiar to our concert rooms—the Sonata in A flat, for instance, and the "Invitation to the Dance;" and we certainly never heard them when they seemed more beautiful in spirit, richer in fancy, and more elegant in form. About his playing of Mendelssohn's music there can hardly be a difference of opinion. It was the perfection of poetic grace. He gave a superb series of *Variations sérieuses*, two Scherzos, and eleven of the Songs without Words. These last were not numbered; but we recognized two of the Barcaroles (No. 1 and No. 15); the well-known No. 4; the beautiful Andante con moto, No. 19; and Nos. 6, 7, 12 and 22. Their charming contrast with the brilliancy of the other portions of the programme heightened the effect of their intrinsic elegance and refinement.

The fourth day was given up to Schumann. It might have seemed rather bold to offer twelve or thirteen pieces by a single composer, unrelieved by anything else; but in effect there was no complaint of monotony, and the variety was greater than on the Beethoven day. Some of the *Etudes symphoniques*; the fantastic little pieces known as "Kreisleriana;" a Romanza in D minor; three Studies for the Pedal Piano, selections from the *Fantaisie Stücke* and *Waldscenen*; and the remarkable *Carneval, scenes mignonnes*—such was the bill of fare. The spirit of it all was gentle and refined. All through the afternoon we heard the soft, caressing touch, we felt the soothing, delicious influence. At times, as in the *Etudes* and the closing scene of the *Carneval*, the astonishing force and brilliancy of the performer roused the enthusiasm of an excited audience; but in general it was tender and romantic rather than brilliant music which fell upon our ears, and we went away with the feeling that Rubinstein was a true poet.

The poetic nature of the man was still more conspicuous, perhaps, at the next concert, when Chopin filled the programme. There were thirty-six pieces—preludes, *études*, nocturnes, dances, ballads, almost all the minor forms of composition, closing with the Funeral March from the Sonata in B minor. The union of strength, majesty, and fantastic grace in this performance was something unparalleled. There was no trace of the morbid sentimentality which so often disfigures the interpretations of Chopin, for Rubinstein remembers, what common-place players are apt to forget, that Chopin's is masculine music.

On the sixth day we had three of Field's excellent Nocturnes, some little gems by Henselt, two specimens of Thalberg, and ten or twelve pieces by Liszt. This was a peculiarly interesting concert for many reasons, not the least of which was the contrast which it offered between two of the most brilliant and yet widely different composers of this generation—Thalberg and Liszt. Rubinstein plays Liszt as nobody ever played Liszt to us before. Miss Topp came nearer to the true spirit of this master than any other of Rubinstein's predecessors; but Miss Topp was only a phenomenal executant, while Rubinstein shows in everything that he is a genius. With the methods of Liszt, however, he has not a close sympathy. Liszt closes the series of musical progressions which Mr. Rubinstein undertook to illustrate. The reflective listener, who looked back from this point over the course, must have wondered whether, after all, we have been moving in the right direction. With the improved construction of the pianoforte, there came, naturally, greater freedom and brilliancy of style; but that art itself has made any advance in the last half-century is by no means certain. That it will make any advance in the road pointed out by Liszt, it is clear that Rubinstein himself does not believe.

We have said that the illustrations of musical progression closed with the sixth recital. The seventh, representing Rubinstein's own work, was a turning back toward the older and, as we think, truer forms. We found here a great deal of the old classical spirit, relieved, of course, from the formality which anciently covered it, simple, dignified, and almost always beautiful. Yet we do not find in Rubinstein's piano music the greatness which we recognize in his compositions for the orchestra. The piano does not satisfy his aspirations. He has never given his heart to it. It is an instrument over which he muses, and indulges in graceful fancies, and fragmentary thoughts, and poetic dreams; but when a great idea comes to him he needs the magnificent resources of the full orchestra to give it proper expression. The last recital, therefore, was incomparably the weakest of the seven, although it abounded in beauties. There was a Melodie, for instance, in F major; there were two Romanzas; there was a Barcarole, and there was a Nocturne, which we can only describe as exquisite; but the longer pieces were not of the highest merit, and the concert, as a whole, was monotonous. Of course the execution of every piece was superb; the last one of all was bewildering in its brilliancy. This was a series of variations on "Yankee Doodle." Its ingenuity was astonishing, its difficulties were huge, its length was terrible. Probably the introduction of an American air—we suppose we must consider "Yankee Doodle" American—was intended as a compliment, and we are duly grateful for the intention; but the audience was too highly cultivated to relish it. For Rubinstein, however, there was a remarkable manifestation of feeling. He was called back again and again, and he must have felt, when he made his last bow to an American audience, that he left here a cordial and sympathetic circle of friends. It is said that he was not well pleased with this country during the first months of his visit. He disliked American manners, and he did not believe in American culture. The musical incidents of the spring gave him a better idea of us. The festival at Steinway Hall, and still more, perhaps, the festival at Cincinnati, surprised and delighted him greatly; and the success of his own recitals must have satisfied him that America was capable of appreciating the best art that Europe had to display. His first concerts were not in all respects successful. They were encumbered with some inexcusable vocalism; they were ill managed in other respects also; they were sometimes given in small towns where connoisseurs were few, and the welcome, though hearty, was not intelligent; and they were given occasionally at unpropitious times. Still the tour on the whole was prosperous. Pianist and manager both made money, and the public reaped abundant profit and delight.

ART.

LA FARGE AND VEDDER.

THE sweeping assertion that the demand creates the supply, is not always true in Art, whatever it may be in Trade. The general public may not notice this fact, but it is painfully apparent to the publishers of illustrated works, whether they take the form of Holiday Books, or of periodicals like THE ALDINE. There was a rage for Holiday Books ten or fifteen years ago, both in England and this country, but it has exhausted itself, and not a day too soon. The best specimens of American Art in this direction are Dr. Palmer's "Folk Songs," and the Artists' Edition of Irving's "Sketch Book;" the worst specimen, if our memory is not at fault, is an illustrated edition of "Enoch Arden," published in Boston in 1864. It would be difficult to find anything worse in the shape of a modern book—worse, we mean, from the standpoint of the Beautiful, and better from the standpoint of the Odd.

It was illustrated by four different artists, two of whom were familiar to the public, while the other two were new. They were Mr. F. O. C. Darley, Mr. W. J. Hennessy, Mr. John La Farge, and Mr. Elihu Vedder—surely the queerest four-in-hand that were ever harnessed together. Mr. Darley was himself—that is to say, he was the Darley whose designs we used to see on bank-notes; Mr. Hennessy was—we suppose we must say himself, for we cannot recall any unformed, indifferent artist with whom to compare him, unless it be Mr. Eugene Benson; as for Mr. La Farge and Mr. Vedder, it is not easy to say whom they precisely resembled, and by what motive their work was actuated. Of the nineteen illustrations in "Enoch Arden," nine were drawn by Mr. La Farge, and four by Mr. Vedder. They are all strange, Mr. La Farge's being, perhaps, the strangest of all; there are indications of beauty in some of them, however, which are as curious as they are unexpected. We feel it in the modeling of the heads of the three children on the sands, and it is fairly radiant in "The Seal of Silence"—the figure of a supernatural being whose finger is laid upon its lips. We stop before this, and say "Here is a singularly pure and spiritual artist, who has entered into the world of souls, and felt in his own soul the serious sweetness of the angels." We turn back to a drawing that we have passed over, "Enoch's Supplication," and, if we are familiar with Blake, say, "This is as spiritual as Blake at his best, and so like him that he might have drawn it." We look at Mr. Vedder's designs, and are repelled by them; but they detain us, in spite of ourselves, they are so informed with a certain kind of power. They remind us of Blake—not as a pupil reminds us of his master, but rather as a son reminds us of his father. They are grim, and weird, but human withal, especially the last one, in which we see the soul of Enoch Arden standing by the suspended body of the crucified Christ. If there be anything better than this among the drawings of the old religious painters, we have yet to see it. Such, in brief, was the illustrated "Enoch Arden," which could hardly have been a commercial success, and which proved, so far as itself went, that the art-demand did not create the art-supply, though it certainly produced an art-curiosity.

We have not written all this to show that we remember a forgotten book, but to trace the early work of two men of genius, and to call attention to later and better work in the same direction. It exists, in the case of Mr. Vedder, in the shape of twelve photographs of his drawings; and, in the case of Mr. La Farge, of twelve similar photographs, and of four illustrations in Mrs. Abby Sage Richardson's "Songs from the Old Dramatists," which we noticed at the time of its publication.

The drawings of Mr. Vedder may be divided into two classes, the subjects of one being ideal heads, and the subjects of the other imaginative figures and buildings. He embodies his conception of "Twilight" for example, in a group of old houses, with peaked roofs, beyond which in the distance are seen the feathery tops of trees. The foreground is filled with a cluster of large flowers on tall stalks. They are bell shaped, and are no doubt swinging out an invisible chime. This, with a glimpse of a dark figure on a winding pathway, is all that can be put in words, but how weird and effective it is in the softened black and white of the photograph. We turn to the "Phorcydes." These are three old women, who somehow are not old. They appear to have been running, and to have stopped suddenly: their ragged garments flutter, and their long disheveled hair is blowing in all directions. They are strange, unearthly, terrible—are they furies; or what? "The Salamander," the third of these drawings, admits us to the elemental world. Here, we say to ourselves, is a creature that could live in fire. So of the figure of "Atlas"—a strong man, with a sweeping beard, standing in the sea, with his waist encircled by the belt of the Zodiac—we say of that—Here now is the man who could uphold the world which is on his shoulders; he is the Endurer. The ideal heads are singular realizations of abstract ideas. We know of nothing like them, even in Blake: they have the strangeness of Blake's work, and they are radiant with loveliness. "A Sea Princess" is beautiful with the beauty which is of the body, the beauty into which soul cannot enter. We place next "The Young Medusa," and the head—that of a child, with flaming hair—entitled "Weirdness." The only human head is "The Shadow of the Cypress," and it is wonderfully pathetic.

The drawings of Mr. La Farge are, with one exception, figure-pieces. Four were inspired by Browning, and they are in many respects the finest of the series. The two which illustrate his "Childe Roland" may be said to belong to the romantic school, while the other two are as certainly classic as they are imaginative and beautiful. There is an indescribable sweetness in the one entitled "Misconceptions," which appears to have been suggested by the poem of that name in "Men and Women." It is not so easy to classify the rest of these drawings, though four of them may be said to deal with legendary themes, and to illustrate the beliefs of the Middle Ages. They are grotesque; and one which represents Bishop Hatto in his cell surrounded by rats, is repulsive and painful. "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" is such a drawing as a child might make (if a child could make it), it is so simple and earnest. "The Wolf Tamer" is remarkable for its savage power, as remarkable as "The Three Kings of Cologne," which takes us back to the rude art of five hundred years ago.

These unique drawings, as well as those of Mr. Vedder, are published by Messrs. Doll and Richards, of Boston.